

Religion of the New Sun

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 23 Nov 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1977>

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Ouroboros — 23 Nov 1999, 08:45

I seem to recall from the published edition of his letters (publisher Houton-Mifflin sp?) that when people asked J.R.R. Tolkien (also Catholic) if "Lord of the Rings" were a Christian allegory, he said "No, I just can't write that way".

I also, recall him conceding that despite his devout, and practicing Faith, there was no real Religion in Middle Earth (unless you count the Swarthy Men's worship of Sauron), let alone a Judeo-Christian one. Although the Middle Earth sub-creation was supposedly placed in the nether-pre-historic past, it *was* still sub-creation. To insert the super-reality of his Faith into a fragile sub-creation would rend it to shreds and blur the line between Fantasy and Reality.

While TBOTNS is set in the distant future, it is not speculative SF. Wolfe is NOT trying to argue that this is a possible future. I know there's an Increate in TBOTNS, there's one at the beginning of the Silmarilion. That's not religion. Wolfe is just trying to tell an interesting, plausible story. So despite the reference to a Christian saint, Wolfe is NOT speculating about the possible future of the Body of Christ.

St. Catherine of Alexandria is a useful motif for TBOTNS because roses and torture are an important element of her story. I'll also point out that of all the canonized saints Wolfe could have selected, he chose one whose very existence is all but certainly fictional, whose feast day the Catholic Church has removed from the calendar.

Finally, in an interview Wolfe balked at the opportunity to say that "Severian is Jesus". He said instead...I know it's not in the story's text but he said it none the less...that Severian is a "Christ-figure" not Jesus. While he's suggested that he believes Jesus made crosses (ala "The Last Temptation of Christ"), Wolfe clearly does not intend to map "one to one" Severian and Wolfe's Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ. Roy's right. It would be blasphemous to equate Jesus and Severian.

Severian is a kind of messiah ("promised one") and Wolfe points to that fact by creating a Temptation in the Wilderness scene between Sev and Typhon. He's the "head" and "savior of his race". But he's only "a" messiah not "the" Messiah. And a fictional one to boot.

So speculation about how the biblical promises of God and the Hope of the faithful apply in TBOTNS is senseless because they don't. One is a something Wolfe has committed his life to and the other is a story he made up.

-Ouroboros

Matthew Malthouse — 23 Nov 1999, 18:39 · follows Ouroboros

Ouroboros wrote:

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although the world of Middle Earth has no overt worship or ritual that's not quite the same thing as saying that there is no religion.

One profound difference between Middle earth and our world is that Manwe and the Valar knew Illuvatar and the Eldar knew the Valar - even men have known some of the Maia, even if only the wise recognise this. There is a certainty possible to them, even at several removes, that has no analogue in this worlds faiths. Indeed 'faith' is not required when any passing elf could supply you with the chief angel's address.

The situation on Urth is not dissimilar. Although we have ritual with forms that we recognise as religious and orders such as the Pelegrines we also have the Heiogramates who appear to have a closer connection to the Increate of that universe than we do. Again faith becomes moot if one can board ship and visit the Increate's servants.

Faith however does rear its head (ugly or otherwise) in the matter of the New Sun. In its promised coming we seem to have some root for popular religion. We also have a parallel for the Second Coming.

Indeed that is not to indicate that here we have a predictive statement directly about Christianity. What there is still room for however is that which Tolkien denied writing: an alegorical statement. Today God or the Increate is not susceptible to proofs of reality. What might change if at some future date it were otherwise?

Matthew

William H. Ansley — 24 Nov 1999, 00:25 · follows Matthew Malthouse

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Exactly so! I have never been able to understand how anyone could complain that there is no religion in The Lord of the Rings when it is obvious that there is no need for religion as we know it in that world.

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I had not though of applying the same argument to TBotNS, however. I'll have to give this more thought.

William Ansley